

2 PETER

REMEMBERING THE PROMISES

2 Peter 1:1-9

Life and Godliness

6/5/2022

We are going to start working through the book of 2 Peter today. We expect this study to last 7 Sundays, then we will do 7 weeks in 7 different Psalms, and then we plan on making our way to Galatians for the fall and winter.

In 1 and 2 Peter, Peter was writing to equip Christians for living lives in a world that isn't Christian.

Peter wrote these letters somewhere around 63 AD, shortly before his death in around 65 AD at the hands of Emperor Nero, who crucified Peter upside-down.

And he was writing around the time that a great persecution broke out against the Christians. In AD 64, the city of Rome burned under Nero's leadership. And even though Nero may have started the fire so he could rebuild Rome better than it was built before, he had to blame somebody for the devastating fires, so he blamed the church, and a great persecution broke out against the church.

This has been a repeated pattern throughout history, a major crisis comes upon society and the Christians get the blame. Christianity gets stigmatized at best and persecuted at worst.

So beginning around 64 AD, Christians began being slaughtered and crucified and burned left and right. This was the time when Nero was known for taking Christians and dipping them in wax and lighting them on fire to light his garden parties.

So in Peter's first letter he dealt with the real trials Christians would face in a world that is hostile to our faith. But in 2 Peter he turns to another set of trials, trials within the church and within individual Christians.

As God's kingdom advances, there are always problems and obstacles. Our weapons for advancing our kingdom aren't physical ones, we aren't waging a physical war, but as the truth of Christ's gospel marches on and changes lives and homes, there are points of conflict created. And there are spiritual battles, sins, failures, and difficulties all along the way until glory.

And in our day, we tend to think that if there are problems in the church, that means that God has withdrawn his hand and blessing from the church. Because, in our prosperity-gospel view of things, we think hard circumstances mean God isn't active. But the New Testament describes plenty of difficulty inside the church and surrounding the church, and never calls that a sign that God isn't at work. Where God is at work, there's always a counterfeit working hard as well, there's always resistance and opposition.

There are problems in the church.

So I think this study will hit even closer to home for us. Because the problems he deals with in 2 Peter are our problems at Grace Road. We are a church that in the 13 years of our existence has been uncommonly blessed. People are always coming to faith and getting baptized, there's a general hunger for the word of God, there's a gracious spirit, many of us have our closest friends here, and God has used us to do a ton for church planting, church revitalization, and serving the community. There is so much good that God has done.

But we also have the same problems addressed in 2 Peter. Professed Christians deciding not to live like Christians when faced with temptation, the voices of false teachers from a number of different schools of thought are swaying us (and bringing some wrecked lives in their wakes), and for all of us, we take our eyes off of Christ and, as a result, become less fruitful in His service. So Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is writing to people like us in a church like ours.

2 Peter 1:1-2 "Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: 2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

So Peter opens the letter here with a greeting. He uses the name Simeon, a variant on Simon, that is used sometimes in the New Testament. And he tells them who he is: an apostle, one sent by Jesus, someone with real authority. But also a servant. He's careful not to even point out his authority without pointing out the fact that he is servant.

And he's writing to people with a faith of equal standing. He isn't asserting his lordship over these people, he isn't flaunting his authority. He has a real god-given role of authority, but he's writing to people he shepherds that he considers his equals.

Back in 1 Peter 5:3, he had told the elders in the church to lead in a way that is:

1 Peter 5:3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

And here he is leading that way. For all of his authority that they should respect, he saw them as brothers and sisters, equals in value. And his desire in writing is not to get something from them, not to assert some power over them, he wants to see grace and peace multiplied to them as they come to know Jesus more.

He wants for them the thing we should want most for ourselves and everybody - that we would grow in the knowledge of Jesus.

And so, with that hope, he jumps right to an important reminder for us:

2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

So, if we have received the same faith (verse 1), we have become Christians, then his divine power has already given us everything we need for life and godliness.

This is a huge truth.

Christians can live godly lives. The godly lifestyle is totally possible, right now, for every believer.

This means that the life that God has commanded us to live is a life we can live. Because it was granted by his divine power. We have everything we need to live a godly life.

This means we never need to sin. This isn't saying we ever reach a point where we don't sin - if anyone says they've reached that point, they're lying - we always need to confess to him, be humbled by our failures, and strive for better. But there is never a sin we have to commit in the moment.

There is never a command we don't have the resources to obey. He has given us all we need for life and godliness.

1 Corinthians 10:13 “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

As Christians, we are never so tempted that we must fall. We can obey.

Which has huge implications in every category of life. Think of all God commands us:

He commands that we rejoice evermore, He commands our joy. We have divine power that enables obedience to that. Not fake joy, the kind without mourning or any sadness, but the real enduring kind - we can be joy-filled people. Because his divine power has given all we need for life and godliness.

He commands us to be faithful to our spouses - we can obey that, and be confident that He has already provided what we need for that.

He commands us to be truthful- no circumstances or situations so force our hand that we must lie.

He commands us to love and serve others - we don't need to wait for life to give us a little more time or energy to do good to others. Love is not something we can't do right now - He has already given us all that we need for life and godliness, it was granted by his DIVINE POWER.

Most of the people I know who talk a lot about the power of God at work are talking about signs and wonders. "We need the power of God to show up, and we know that it has shown up when there are more healings, and miracles, more emotional expression in worship, and more outward manifestations of God's presence among us." (All good things.) But we think power always means spectacular. And when spectacular isn't happening, we wonder, "Where's the power?"

But in 2 Peter, those outward signs aren't even mentioned. The divine power mentioned here has already been given to every believer and it **enables godly living**.

We are right to point out God's power at work behind a miracle or healing. But we are wrong if we think God's power is not at work when Christians are quietly and faithfully striving to lead godly lives. That's what the power does for us in this passage.

The power of God is most evident in our lives when we live godly lives.

Wanna see God's power? Don't look at what's happening on the stage at church.

Look at the man striving day in and day out to work hard and honestly at his job, pay his bills, lead his family, stay faithful to his wife, speak with kindness, maintain joy in a broken world, confess his failures, live humbly, pray and read his bible,

take his family to church, and love and serve his community. That's the power of God on display.

Look at the woman who spends time in the word of God in prayer, growing in her knowledge of Christ, so she can be a light to her community, her church, her children and grandchildren. The one who fights the daily temptations of instagram comparison, who builds her life on what's lasting and doesn't get distracted with fleeting vanities. That's the power of God working in a heart.

In 2 Timothy, Paul describes some false Christians like this:

2 Timothy 3:5 “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”

There are people that we should avoid, he says. And they are people who have the appearance of godliness, they are claiming to be Christian, but they lack the power.

But people who deny the power of godliness aren't people who lack a woo-wootingly spiritual energy, they are people who don't live godly lives. To deny the power of God is not just to miss out on miracles, it's to fail to strive for the holy life God requires of us.

So Paul isn't requiring us to avoid people who don't convey the right emotional energy, he is saying to avoid people who don't strive to live godly and holy lives and yet claim to be Christian. Those are people with the appearance of godliness who deny its power.

The people who are in church, but when push comes to shove, they just won't obey Jesus when they want to do something else. That's a form of godliness that denies its power.

Christians, he has given us the power we need for godly living. How? (Verse 3)

2 Peter 1:3 “ through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence”

So this power comes through the knowledge of Jesus. If we know Jesus, if we have the knowledge of Jesus, we have been given everything we need for life and godliness. It's already ours.

2 Peter 1:4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

So he says two things are possible here: we become partakers in the divine nature, and we escape the corruption that's in the world.

To be a partaker of the divine nature doesn't mean we become divine, or that we become god. It means that the nature of God, in this context, his glory and excellence, in verse 3, is something we share in. God has allowed us to share in some of his holiness, some of his excellence.

And He has enabled us to escape the corruption that is in the world through sinful desires.

This is a uniquely Christian view of the world. We don't believe the world itself is corrupt - the sin is not in the material world. The sin is in the sinful desire - it's the greek word epithumia - sometimes translated lust. It isn't just desire, but sinful desire, over-desire, misplaced desire.

It's the same word that's used in 1 John 2:16 where John divides these over-desires into three categories:

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world--the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions--is not from the Father but is from the world.

A. Overdesire of the flesh

This is where we excessively desire things we can feel.

Things like sleep, food, rest, leisure, sex, drink. And all of those things are good, and in different places the Bible says they are given by God.

But when they become overdesires, when we are driven by them, it's a corruption. When we make our decisions based not on seeking first God's kingdom, but seeking first the desires of our bodies, we're loving the world in the bad way.

When we take God out of the picture, it's like taking the Sun out of the solar system, every planet flies out of orbit and eventually crashes into things.

When we remove God as our driving force, as our central desire, every other desire flies out of whack. These things become gods, we think they'll save us, and it wrecks us.

The reason we eat too much food is because we expect that it can give us ultimate pleasure or comfort, because we don't have that in God.

The reason we have sex outside of marriage is because at that moment, the desire for sexual pleasure becomes ultimate and isn't submitted to God.

So on the one hand we say it is fine to enjoy those things in their right places, on the other hand we say that they make horrible gods.

B. Overdesires of the Eyes

This is when we take the things we can see and make them ultimate (the lust of the flesh is an overdesire for things we can feel, the desires of the eyes are overdesires for what we can see)

The things that we would normally call vanity if people live for them. Things like beauty, fame, and an image.

Physical beauty was made by God. But there can be an overdesire for physical beauty that ruins you, because you always run after it and it is never enough.

But even if you aren't pursuing beauty, the desires of the eyes can express themselves in your depression over always feeling too ugly, or too heavy, or embarrassed about some physical feature. It's not enough to be healthy, you just have to keep pushing for more and more compliments.

You carefully manage your image - it is enough for you to be thought of as godly, to appear godly, but you deny the actual power of humbly striving to live a righteous life.

C. Pride in Possessions - or pride of life - (the word for possessions there is BIOS - which means the things of life.)

But probably an overdesire of the ego is in view, often a pride in status symbols and a heightened view of our own importance.

You have to have just the right clothes, just the right car, just the right look, to make you acceptable.

Churches are breedinggrounds for pride of life. We gossip, or contribute to a party spirit, or we always try to get in the spotlight, or are easily offended and put off. It's all the pride of life - the overdesire of the ego.

So what do we need to believe to defeat these overdesires?

The promises of God, according to 2 Peter 1:4 (again)

2 Peter 1:4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

God has given us promises.

God has promised us something better - and through those promises we can escape the corruption that's in the world through desire.

So when we're tempted to sin to get some physical comfort, the promise that Christ's peace ruling in our hearts is ours and is better can overcome it.

When we're tempted to become vain and shallow, we have promises from God of everlasting joy and acceptance before Him that's better than shallow acceptance from our neighbor.

When we're tempted toward maintaining an image and living in pride, we have something better in the true glory and excellence of Christ that is ours, not when we're arrogant, but when we humble ourselves and confess.

We have these promises from God that are so much better than any of the pleasures there are in sin.

So don't try to grow and change and fight sin by having a mindset that all of the really good stuff in life is the corrupt stuff, and that if you're ever happy it must be because you're doing something wrong. Seek happiness in Jesus, see the promises of Jesus not just as the rules that keep you away from things, but as precious and great and so much better.

Christians are supposed to be people who know joy like nobody else.

“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” - CSL

The pleasure of sin is a cheap imitation of real pleasure, and doesn't hold a candle to being in right relationship with God.

Christians, while we sometimes earn the reputation of being stuffy and dull, should know the greatest possible pleasure, because we seek it the only place it is to be had for real: in God. Not in his gifts, in God.

And because we have that power, he says to therefore:

2 Peter 1:5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, 5 and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

So this is one of the big virtue lists in the New Testament. Again and again, we are commanded to add virtue to our lives.

And remember, a primary reason for Peter's writing is to equip us to be able to stand when we run into false teachers. We'll get there in a couple of weeks, but Peter will write:

2 Peter 2:1-3 "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

So notice false teachers will bring heresies, destructive beliefs, and they will work to seduce with sensuality - unbridled desire. So to be equipped for false teachers, we don't just need knowledge but also virtue.

False teachers lead astray with false info, but also with the desires they promote.

So as Christians, we need to be equipped with info and knowledge, but also self-control, an aversion to sensuality.

And he starts the list by saying that we should make every effort (verse 5) to add these virtues to our lives. We might read this list like we add one, then get the next, then the next, but verse 8 says they are all supposed to be increasing - so this is a list of things that we are to be making every effort to add to our lives:

Faith - which is trust in Jesus and his saving work.

Virtue - moral excellence.

Knowledge - and this is the kind of knowledge that doesn't just know things, but understands them. It's wisdom.

Self-Control - in a world where we are called to find the true self and express the true self, we're called by God to be in control of the self. These false teachers lead astray with desire, but restraint of desire is a Christian virtue, that is possible, and should be increasing in our lives.

Steadfastness - endurance in battle or an athletic contest. The Christian life is for the long haul, and we need steadiness and perseverance. Piper contrasts adrenal Christians and cardiac Christians. Adrenal Christians get a burst of energy for spiritual zeal and then it's gone, burned out like an adrenaline rush. But we are to cultivate steadfastness, becoming cardiac Christians - with the steady lub-dub heartbeat of faithfulness regardless of circumstances.

Godliness - this is piety. This is respectful conduct toward God and others.

Brotherly affection - Greek "philadelphia." In the greek world this was a loyalty and affection that you only extended to family, because you were in competition with people not in your family. So of course a father would be kind toward his children, but not necessarily the other kids. Of course a mother would be loyal to her husband and faithful to her home, but she was out to defeat those other

households. But the early Christians extended this kind of love to each other, even when they came from different households.

And non-Christians saw Christians living this way and they despised them for treating others like family. This was inexplicable in a world where everybody was out to win over everybody, everybody was striving to be the best - the Christians were extending brotherly affection to those they should have been at war with.

And in our cancel-culture that is just ravenous for the next person to hate, we should be striving to put on brotherly affection.

This could really set us apart. Which is why the chief virtue, the capstone on this list, is the next one:

Love - In 1 Corinthians 13, where we can't turn now because of time, the attributes of this virtue are listed: patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not proud, is not rude, is not self-seeking, isn't easily angered.

But it's important to note that love is a virtue, not a feeling. We aren't commanded to always feel great feelings about each other, or even to like each other all the time, but to love one another. The emphasis in describing love in the NT is on what love does, how it acts.

And remember, God's power has given us all we need to develop all of these virtues. And:

1 Peter 1:8 **8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The Bible says faith without works is dead. Faith that doesn't do anything is useless. And if we are wondering, as we should be wondering, what faith does, lists of virtues like this give us the answer. And if these qualities are ours and increasing, we bear fruit - we produce something.

And all of these things should be increasing over the course of the Christian life.

Sometimes we think that the virtues of the Christian life will all come to us in a moment of crisis:

If I hit rock bottom, then I will change all of my ways at once.

When things get really bad, then I'll change.

Certainly, if you're in a crisis, don't waste that. If you have lived your life for yourself and it seems to be careening out of control, you can ask Jesus to take the wheel for sure.

If the wheels are coming off your life, that can be a great moment for receiving grace and repentance and really changing. Make the most of that crisis.

But Peter here emphasizes "plodding," or consistently increasing growth. Growing as a Christian is much more like a long-distance backpacking trip than it is a hundred yard dash. And it's about chipping away at it all with the consistent, little habits. The fifteen minutes in the morning reading the bible and praying, listening to sermons and Christian podcasts to help you grow in knowledge as you drive along, staying connected to a relatively boring but faithful church, taking a day off for rest and worship every week, staying in close Christian relationships, just keep plodding along.

But avoid one big error.

Avoid the error of thinking that gaining virtues as a Christian is exactly the same as you would gain them as a non-Christian. Stoics can be virtuous people who learn to train themselves to live good lives, who learn to master emotions, who are very disciplined.

But our virtue-gaining is not the non-Christian type.

These virtues are, verse 8, the fruit of knowledge of Jesus.

They grow from knowing Jesus.

2 Peter 1:9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

Anywhere the New Testament commands us to acquire virtues or to obey in any way, it always connects it to what has already happened to us in the Gospel.

It's because of our faith in Christ's death, resurrection, and cleansing work on our behalf that we strive for virtue. It's never to earn God's love, it's never to get a leg up on one another, it's always because of a work that He has already done in our hearts.

A real risk in religious virtue is that we can acquire it, and then get arrogant. And how many arrogant religious people have we known? That's almost the norm!

Church-goers are known for being snooty arrogant people who think they're better than everyone else. And if we make any gains at becoming virtuous, this is the risk, because our hearts love to win.

We can still be in competition with everybody else in our minds.

But this must all begin with the gospel.

The Gospel humbles us - it says we are so sinful that no virtue acquisition could ever get us to God. We've sinned and fallen short of his glory.

But it also reassures us - Jesus has cleansed us. We couldn't do that ourselves, He had to do that. We couldn't work our way to that, we couldn't plod our way to that, He had to give that to us out of sheer grace through faith.

That's what makes us his. And all of the works of the Christian life flow from that - we are cleansed, so we want to have brotherly affection because the competition is over. We are forgiven, so we want to cultivate godliness and respect toward God and others. We have eternity guaranteed for us, so we live steadfast, steady, continuing-on-the-hike cardiac Christian lives - it isn't that long to go.

All obedience must flow from gospel belief.

And if there is no steady stumbling plodding toward virtue, we have forgotten our cleansing. The problem is that we took our eyes off of Christ.

To do what we want to do, to give up self-control, to live life for ourselves, for our desires, to do just what we think we need to do instead of what the Lord commanded us to do, is to forget what we've received.

So cultivate this life mostly by looking to Jesus again and again. By regularly confessing sin and failure and remembering the cross. Let's do that now.

Prayer of Confession

Father, we thank you all you have given us in Christ. In Him we have all we need for godliness - we have forgiveness, cleansing, and power to grow in virtue. Yet we confess that so often we don't - we don't make the effort, we get frustrated with the slow results from plodding so we quit, and when we don't grow more like you we are forgetting what you've done for us.

Jesus, we thank you for your sacrifice - that you, perfect in every way, would go to the cross to die to pay for our sins and impart to us your godliness is astounding.

Spirit, we pray for a restored vision of Jesus that will enable us to add to our faith these virtues that make us fruitful.

Assurance of Pardon

Acts 10:43 "To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Sermon Discussion Questions:

- 1) Discuss the implications of 2 Peter 1:3, namely that God has already given us all we need for life and godliness.
- 2) How, practically, can we use the promises of God to help us escape the corruption of sinful desires (2 Peter 1:4)? How do we actually do that?
- 3) Examine the virtue list in 2 Peter 1:5-7. What stands out as particularly convicting? How might you grow in that virtue?
- 4) How do we grow in virtue distinctively as Christians? How is this different than growing in virtue in a non-Christ-centered way?